



Au Naturel

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Salon Discounts

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THE SOULBIRD HAS RISEN: A Review of India Arie's *Songversation*

I'm closing the 2013 volume of Au Naturel newsletters with a celebration of [India Arie's *Songversation* CD](#). It is a beautiful, reflective and thought-provoking commentary on life. It has become my favorite piece of entertainment for the time being. Over the years, I have found her words mirror so much of my own life that I have come to appreciate the commonality of the life journey that we each are taking respectively. She reminds us all of the very simple truths of life with her own life as a living testimony of grace, power and love. If you listen carefully, you will surely learn something or see yourself. If not, no worries. You're either already informed or you're just not ready. Whichever the case, it's all good... All things come in the fullness of time.

India Arie, hands down, is my favorite artist! Her message of love is the most powerful and the most consistent that I've heard among "secular" artists. After seeing her concert in May 2009, I wrote the following poem. Ironically, her journey between 2009-2013 was almost precisely as I had written. The irony just reminds me that she is a kindred soul. I don't know her, but I do. Very well!

Why is it that I'm such a fan of India Arie?
It's because she is my voice
The mirror of my soul on this voyage of life.
She expresses thoughts that I have buried deep within my sub-conscious.
Her words awaken eternal truths which never sleep.
Her music is like an arrow piercing the armor of my *self*, flying to the heart of my soul
Her words seize my heart and wrest it away from my body
Holding it up before my eyes and demanding that I "look deeply."
And when I see the sheer simplicity of all that man has made complicated
I cry... full of pity for the state of humanity
And for myself.
In the case of love, here again India has captured my spirit.
Almost as if she speaks for me.
Brown Skin and *Chocolate High* are not just songs.
They are anthems of power and perfection.
I understand so well.
In truth, these works are the actual experience of love in 4-D...
The thoughts of the spirit accompanied by a beautiful melody,
Co-mingled with passion and intensity, and wrapped in the sincerity of emotion.
India, your presence... your life is a gift to the world.
You have had the courage to take the road less traveled
And now, even the lilies of the valley must salute you.
I know that your journey is not an easy one
As solitude sometimes can be quite maddening.
But this is the truth of the human condition which is the same for all the world... and for me too.
So take the time that you need to heal when you need it.
And return to the world with renewed energy, ready to remind us all
Of those truths which can never be hidden by indifference or compromise.

The Soulbird has risen INDEED!

The Concert



Well, many Au Naturel readers who know me well are probably wondering how I let a review of India Arie's *Songversation* concert end with only the words "the bomb-diggety" in my last issue. Well, at that time, I didn't have a complete picture of the *Songversation* CD because I hadn't actually heard it prior to the concert. So, my words were strictly about the show and how it was received.

I intentionally did not want to be exposed to the songs prior to the show. India is a crystal clear communicator. So, I wanted her concert to introduce me to the CD with all the energy and essence of her being, coupled with words that are timeless and true and my open and receptive heart. I considered buying the CD after the concert, but I just don't like lines if I can avoid them and THAT line was just too long for my liking. I figured there are other ways for it to be had, so I left. And as the universe would so have it, one of my regular clients and a dear friend heard me rave about the concert while doing her hair a few days later. Her words: "*Do you like India Arie that much? I bought the Songversation CD a few weeks back, listened to it, and said 'that's enough...I wonder who would like this?'*" And so, the CD was placed in my hand the following week with love and well wishes. The least I could do to show appreciation for such a beautiful blessing is to bring others to the party and help them hear the music draped in the positive intention with which it was created. I pray I do her and her music justice.

While at the concert, I was seated in the orchestra in a middlin' sort of place but instead of row N (where I sat four years ago), I was on row P. I literally went to the DPAC site on the day and hour the tickets went on sale only to discover that the best I could get for the price was row N. I felt that was most synchronistic, but while trying to snag some middle row seats, someone beat me to the punch and I was twice booted out of my purchase. So, I had to jump back two rows just to lessen the fray and seal the deal. Chic is hot in the Carolinas!! No doubt!

The concert opened with a video screen and inspiring quotes, images of flowers blooming, birds flying and the like. I smiled inwardly as I recognized *the familiar*. In her typical style, she opened with *Remembrance* which brought me to tears as video images appeared of Sam Cooke, Marvin Gaye, Donny Hathaway, Luther Vandross, Michael Jackson, Whitney Houston and Nina Simone—a most fitting intro. I thought, Lord am I crying already?! It really was the only time though. She then explained the format of the show which would be to have a conversation

with the audience through song. She acknowledged that she had not been to NC in four years and that was due largely to personal trials. In her words, she had a "break down" and considered retiring from music—not because she doesn't love music but rather to be free to create in the ways that she wants to. I was not surprised. If you have listened to the song [River Rise](#), on her last CD, she clearly told the world where she was spiritually. Listen... I'm so glad she has been redeemed. So, Songversation is her return to her artistic roots and the songs are about her road to discovery. NICE!! She then bounded into *Video* which she followed up with *I Am Not My Hair*. The auditorium was ON FIRE! And when she threw off her braided wig to reveal a buzz cut underneath, the PLACE EXPLODED!! The applause was deafening. I looked at my husband and said, "I love this woman!!" while clapping in unison with my compatriots. And with that fantabulous intro, she launched into her new creation...Songversation.

The Way to Listen



On those occasions when I choose to drive to work, I've been enveloped in a sea of sound that is India Arie. For a few weeks now, it is all I listen to. My mind's eye has compared the power of the lyrics, the delivery and the soulful intention of the music with her past CDs in an effort to decide which is my favorite. But, that is an exercise in futility. Suffice it to say that this CD is on par with all of the others, which is saying A LOT!! So with that, I must emphasize that you can't fully appreciate this CD until you're immersed in it. [Buy it!](#) This CD is best listened to with the volume UP! There are some crescendos, harmonies and scale progressions that are priceless gems that can be lost on low volume. The intros, interludes and outros are absolute poetry!! Her clarinetist is a genius! I would also love to meet the brother signing baritone for the chorus of *Soulbird Rise*. His voice stands out

for all of two seconds on the entire CD and brings a smile to my face every time I hear it. Brotherman is in the ZONE! No doubt. Quite masterful!!

Well, I am so inspired by this CD that I've taken the time to find video links of all of the songs on this CD to give you a beautiful preview of the music. From the standpoint of copyright and propriety, please know that I have nothing to gain here. My sole intention is to shine a light on this beautiful work. [After this newsletter preview, I hope that your heart is so moved to purchase this CD to support Ms. India Arie.](#) She is an angel of light in a world that is sometimes dark and full of despair. I want everyone to feel the power of the music in the silent moments of your life. For that reason, I encourage you to read this newsletter when you have [at least](#) one hour of reflective time to consider, to digest, to reflect. Many readers will want to close this link with that thought as this fast pace world doesn't really have time for such luxuries as reflection. That is a sad commentary on our collective reality. But if that is how you feel, I encourage you to go against the grain and to reserve some time for your soul. Listening to her music is like going to church for me personally. It is a spiritual experience that nourishes my mind, my heart and my soul. Her music is cloaked in God's grace and beauty and love. Listen with a heart of peace. Be patient and very silent. And perhaps you will hear you own heart smile with knowing...

The Songs



I've considered how best to structure this discussion because there is just so much I could say about this CD and Ms. Arie. It seems rather redundant because her music quite beautifully speaks for itself. All the same, if I have your ear with this newsletter, I want to introduce you to a master if you have not fully embraced her genius. I had decided to defer to the actual flow of her music as recorded on her CD, as she well considered how she wanted her music to be heard. But as I began to write, a thematic vibe overtook me so I went with it. The next sections introduce the music based on the themes that were most pronounced in my view.

Overcome Fear

India starts this album with [Just Do You](#)--a fast pace celebration of LIFE. I believe it is a most appropriate introduction in light of her own words about how conflicted she has been in the music industry. I can relate to the words because I recall the day that I chose to emerge from the shadow of my wifely status and to do ME. The actual words that I heard were: What are you waiting for...? That day set the stage for *Schatzi's* and just about everything else that I have become. I did have to wait for my kids to get some years on them first though. But now, I live my life to please my spirit and God. Perhaps regrettably for my husband, this means that I've become a horrible home-maker. I leave home early, come home late, work on week-ends, sleep on Sundays, and cook when and if I feel like it. Poor soul! But then, a home-maker is not what God thought he needed. And so, he got me. © He's adjusted. Besides, he's a better cook than I am. But, I digress... The bottom line is that "Just Do You" is an anthem to ignite the spark inside of anyone who doubts whether they CAN or SHOULD. The words are a mirror reflection of my own experience. And while the journey has not been easy, I did overcome an

aspect of fear that was controlling my life. Fear, I believe, is the greatest obstacle that all of humanity has to overcome...

[Break the Shell](#) is another prelude to self-discovery with an outward appeal; but, this piece is a slower-paced melody draped in a personal storyline and grounded in southern folk culture. According to India, the prophet is Cicely Tyson. While *Just do you* says reach within, transform yourself and dare to be. *Break the Shell* says aim to reach your full potential by coming out of yourself to truly LIVE. She further writes, "We have the choice to live OR (my emphasis) truly be alive. This is your life." This is a message that I believe many Black men and women need to hear. So often, we seek only to get by; to have a nice job, the house, the marriage, the two kids and a dog. There's nothing wrong with that dream but, there's so much more to life. Rather than find a good job, why not create good jobs. As India says, "someone has to raise the bar." It might as well be YOU!



Be Open and Accepting of Life

[Life I Know](#), in my view, is the most transparent, soul-stirring and humbling piece on the entire CD. It's India's acknowledgement that she doesn't have the marriage, the kids, the classic dream--and her acknowledgement of just how much that truth hurts at times. When I heard this song at the concert for the first time, I yelled encouragement to the stage with the words: "And what a beautiful life it IS!!" referencing the gift that is her life. India nodded and acknowledged my statement with a verbal affirmation of: "Yes, it is" and moved on. Since that day, I've heard this song many times. Sometimes I cry at its honest portrayal of life's realities. *Life I Know* is about acceptance of life as it is--not the ideal that we imagine to be so much more in sync with our heart's desire. It's about accepting our destiny and being comfortable with the beauty and the pain of life, while growing from the richness of the experience. Very honest, very beautiful.

[Soulbird Rise](#) is one of my favorite songs on the CD. It is a haunting hymn, full of anticipation, grace, beauty and hope. In my view, it is a love song--a love song to the self. It acknowledges the power that we have to rise above our current place in life to self-actualize as agents of light and love, made in God's image. The melody is divinely inspired. While [Thy Will Be Done](#) is a Reggae beat which acknowledges India's acceptance that whatever happens in life, God rules. It's a prayer for serenity and of service. May we all learn to "burn our pride" to be more perfect agents of His will.

Love

[Flowers](#) is the song on the CD that gives me chill bumps and brings me to tears more often than any other. It is a timeless celebration of thanksgiving and a moving tribute to India's own mother who has inspired and encouraged her so much. *Our family is our culture. In many respects, it is all that we can truly call our own. We MUST love, honor and respect it.* If I reflect on my mother at all while this song is playing, which is hard NOT to do, I'm going to cry. So one morning while driving into work, I called Mom and serenaded her with this song. She was pleasantly surprised. There is a strong Middle Eastern flavor to this tune that calls my spirit and brings a smile to my face at each chorus, even when the tears are flowing. This one is definitely best played with elevated volume.

[Brother's Keeper](#) is likely seen by the average listener as a song of romantic love. In my view, it encompasses romantic love and so much more. I don't think the song relates only to one's significant other but to all of those souls in our sphere of influence who we are blessed to touch and impact. It challenges us all to pay attention to the needs of others and to be givers of love rather than recipients. It acknowledges that we do collectively have a responsibility to care for each other while we are on the Earth plane, and India acknowledges her own intention to take up the mantle and to be present.

[One](#) is the second song on the CD that is most likely to give me chill bumps and bring me to tears. Also with a strong Middle Eastern flavor, this song is a prayer for tolerance and understanding throughout all of humanity.

Soul Love

[Coco Butter](#) is a beautiful commentary on the healing power that a man's love can have on the soul of a woman. When she wears the scars of life, which are sadness or fatigue, anger or fear, he feels her heart and brings his own spirit energy as a soothing balm to ease away the pain.... It is a beautiful piece.

[Nothing That I Love More](#) is a fun, upbeat testimony to love and happiness.

Of all of the love songs on the CD, [This Love](#) and [Moved By You](#) are the songs that best speak to my soul. Listen.... Very beautiful. Songs from previous CDs, like *The Truth, Ready for Love, Beautiful, and Brown Skin* suggest that Ms. India Arie has loved well. When I listen to these songs, I believe in my heart that Ms. India Arie has met her "perfect one." *Promise* and *This Love* suggest that she may not be with this person. Perhaps I'm wrong. Whatever the case, I pray that she has the strength, courage and wisdom to continue on her pathway. I don't believe her music would be quite so passionate and beautiful without her inner soul struggle. I pray that her day in the sun shall come with all of the passion, intensity and honesty that she so well deserves...

Soul love, in my view, begins with a profound love of self. It's not until we are able to truly love ourselves and see ourselves as mirror reflections of divinity that we are able to see the divinity in others and love them as they should be loved. [I Am Light](#) is a most fitting end to the CD and a beautiful reminder of the divinity in us all.

The fundamental message of her entire CD and her life's work is LOVE. And with that said, I say, "[Get the CD.](#)" Let her music speak to your heart the way it has spoken to mine and millions of others. The girl's got skills! I am so proud of her, and feel truly blessed that her music has graced my generation. God kissed her twice when he gave her the talent of ART. He will not be disappointed with how she has multiplied her talents. It brings tears to my eyes to think just how pleased He must be with her!! Amen!